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S E R M O N

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NATURAL RELIGION.

BY

A NATURAL MAN

A M E R I C A :

BOSTON, PRINTED BY I. THOMAS,

FOR THE AUTHOR.

S E R M O N

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NATURAL HISTORY

Read at the Communion
Horsington 11. Aug 1727

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FOR THE AUTHOR

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O JEHOVA, ELOHIM ADONAI! *Thou incomprehensible, deign us to adore Thy perfections; let us admire Thy wisdom, power and goodness: We praise Thee, almighty GOD, and give Thee thanks, for forming us in the manner Thou hast done: Glorified be Thy name: Every creature existing shews Thy glory, Thy might, and Thy bounty. Amen.*

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O JEHOVA, ELLOHIM ADO-
RAIT THU UNVERBODEN
heide us te adere Thy per-
fection; let us admire Thy wil-
dom, power and goodness: We
praise Thee, almighty God, and
give Thee thanks, for forming
us in the manner Thou hast done;
Glorified be Thy name; many
creatures existing praise Thy glory.
Thy might and Thy beauty. A-
men.

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NATURAL RELIGION.

I. CORINTHIANS, chap. ii. verse 14.

The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

IF Saint Paul understood by the spirit of God the perpetual motion and the universal direction of all things, by which the infinite and all powerful Being governs and regulates the world, then the natural man must certainly receive the things of the spirit of God, because all
his

his actions and motions must be necessarily directed by this perpetual, eternal and universal spirit, and without it he cannot exist at all, or have any being. But when the spirit of God is taken to be a different divine essence and substance of the almighty regulator of all things existing; then certainly *the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*; that is, he understandeth them not, they are incomprehensible, supernatural and mysterious doctrines, acquired by inspiration, faith, and extraordinary divine instruction, which a natural man is entirely incapable of. Wherefore this natural man can know no more than what natural reason dictates, and leads him to. Reason is that power in the human mind, whereby it compares its several sensations, ideas, &c. either immediately one with the other, or mediately by some common measure, as Mr. LOCKE most beautifully exemplifies: If for instance we would compare two fields of different dimensions together, we can only take a chain, rod, &c. and apply it to the one in such manner, as to find the length of every side, and by casting that up, settle the contents of the one; and then proceed in like manner with the other, and then setting down the less number under the greater, subtract, and find the difference; or, should the number turn out equal, pronounce them alike. Now, if a natural man by said reason compares many objects

jects, which occur to his contemplation, together, and considers the beautiful structure of the world, he must naturally be brought to the sublimest admiration, and adore the supreme director of all these consummate works of nature: And in reasoning in this manner he will find, that there can be no more but only one single individual, which has produced, regulates and directs all these immense bodies which we daily see; and that it is impossible, that an infinite God can have equals, or that any thing can exist without or besides himself, as infinity comprehends the whole, and every atom in the universe. Such a consideration must excite in us the most awful reverence of this divine motor of all things, and induce us to adore him with the greatest religious fervour, and to praise his incomprehensible wisdom, his infinite goodness, and his consummate and all-exceeding omnipotence. Such reasoning undoubtedly will conduct a natural man to the observance of natural religion. This induces me to consider the state of a truly natural man, and how much natural religion can contribute to the happiness of such a man. To proceed herein, let us examine,

First, What is nature: Secondly, The natural man: Thirdly, Religion in general: and, Fourthly, Natural religion.

First, RIDER in his dictionary under the article of nature says, " Nature is the established order and course of material things; the series of second causes, or the law which God has impressed

pressed on matter : The action of providence, or that spiritual power diffused throughout the creation, which moves and acts in all bodies, and gives them certain properties ; this, though by the ancients held to be a cause distinct from the deity, or acting together with him, is no other than God, the first cause of all things, and the preserver and ruler of all the phænomena of nature. Sentiments or ideas consistent with the truth or reality of things ; natural affection and reverence, or the principles implanted in us by the deity." Thus far RIDER.

Secondly, The second consideration is that of a natural man : According to my conception, a natural man is a person who directs all his actions by the dictates of reason, and who contemplates the works of nature with an awful and reverent admiration.

Thirdly, Religion in general is the worship of one or more deities, according to the ideas and tenets which have been imprinted in the minds of the worshippers.

Fourthly, Natural religion is a worship and contemplation of an only infinite and eternal Being, and of his attributes, as far as human nature is capable of the investigation of them. If therefore natural religion is a worship, and contemplation of an only infinite and eternal Being, &c. which I suppose no reasonable man can deny ; then it follows naturally, by what has been advanced above, the natural man must certainly be of said religion, and consequently a Deist.

Deist. But to be the more exact, and to go distinctly to work, let us consider what is a Deist, Polytheist, and Atheist. A Deist (I comprehend in this list Arians and Unitarians) is a person who acknowledges, adores, and reveres an all-powerful wisdom and director of all the immensity, who admires the stupendous effects of his consummate productions, and who with astonishment takes a survey of the marvellous symmetry and surprizing order, wherewith all these immense bodies are directed in a most perfect regularity: What high idea must this Deist, this natural, man conceive of such an all-powerful God, when he considers the universe, and turns his mind to the contemplation of him and his works? I know the clergy commonly define a Deist, to be a person believing an only God, but denying all inspiration and revelation in general: But I believe, if I am not deceived, that they have a wrong notion of Deists; for I imagine, that no Deist or Naturalist denies an inspiration of the spirit of God, or that *summum* and *perpetuum mobile*, but is contrary convinced, that every thing is directed by it in the most beautiful manner. And how can a Naturalist deny a revelation, when God reveals himself every day to him, in the contemplation of those immense and enormous bodies, which revolve in such regular order within the boundless space of the universe? What can be to him a more convincing proof of the existence of such a perfect, all-powerful infinite Godhead? Many of

the clergy will perhaps object to me in regard of what I have advanced before, and will say, It is not the question here of a natural inspiration and revelation; here is meant a particular præter and supernatural one, delivered to some particularly chosen and elected men! Men after the heart of God, to whom he revealeth himself in visions, dreams, trances, apparitions, &c. Lo! here stands my natural man, the honest Deist. Must he not confess, *that the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, &c.* Stand still Deist! leave of thy reasoning, these are præternatural, superuatural things, incomprehensible things for a man, who is guided only by reason, and knows nothing of a spiritual revelation. Captivate thy reason! Is it possible for thee to comprehend Moses's history of the creation? What do you say of God's planting the tree of life in the garden? What of the cunningness of the serpent? What of God forbidding Adam and Eve to eat of the tree, lest they die, and of the first parents having their free will? Confess unbelieving Deist, it is too high and too wonderful for thee! What subterfuge, what shift can you have to extricate yourself out of this labyrinth, out of this dilemma? I think there are two ways to escape this intricate abyfs in some manner: Either, you must submit to an absolute implicit faith, though it seems impossible for you to believe it, and consequently turn a hypocrite; or (but *incidit in Scyllam*

Scyllam qui vult vitare Charybdim, i. e. He falls in a greater and worse danger, when he intends and strives to escape a small one.) You may say, that Moses did write in a mystical, figurative, and hyperbolical style, or rather that he, like others, who did give us the history of the Aborigines, as Ovid in his metamorphoses, &c. was obliged to mix the real with the fabulous; and then beware of the ecclesiastical ban, excommunication and inquisition! Be it sufficient for the present what we have said of the Deist. A Polytheist, is a person who believes and worships more than one God. Now, if we, as according to the definition we may do, reckon those among the Polytheists, who adore and revere a good being or God, and a bad being or the Devil; a Naturalist will discover immediately the absurdity of such an opinion, because his reason will convince him, that there cannot be two equally powerful directors and governors of the universe, acting diametrically opposite one to another: Of the Polytheists, who worship a great many deities, the most part may be admitted to be reasonably addicted to their religion, if we suppose them, as I believe really the most part do, to adore the supreme Being, by paying worship to some of his productions, as they are ignorant in what manner they can pay sufficient homage and veneration to that infinite and all-powerful God, who comprehends every thing contained in the infinite system of this world; and I imagine this was the reason that

at Athens they erected an altar, and dedicated it, *To the unknown God*. We come now to consider the Atheist. An Atheist is such as believes no God at all, or an infinite eternal Being, and pays no reverence to him; on the contrary, ridicules every thing which is said of him. I cannot imagine there ever hath been, can be, or will be in future times an Atheist in theory. For as soon as a man begins to reason, and to make speculative observations, wherein theory consists, he must immediately perceive how absurd it is to think, that all that he sees and observes to move in such a beautiful order, should, or can be by chance, or without any direction; consequently he will conclude there must be an infinite regulator and perpetual motor of this universe, and that such a Being deserves to be adored, admired and respected. That there may be some Atheists by practice, I will admit, but then I do not think they can have a firm and real belief, but as stupid thoughtless brutes wish only by a capricious nonsense that there might be no God. And such are unhappy enough, for they are detested, abhorred and despised by every body, as a pest and plague to society. Having considered the natural man and his religion, let us make some observations on it. As the natural man is led by the dictates of nature and reason only, he never can be persuaded, that, as different even as the religious sentiments one of another may be, any one can be damned to all eternity for differing

differing in opinions one from the other, even an Atheist himself; because every thing is by the Almighty's direction, and all the difference of sentiments cannot detract or lessen the least thing in regard to his all-goodness or omnipotence, on the contrary, these diversities contribute to the perfection, beautifulness and accomplishment of a variegated infinite universe. The Naturalist knows, that all things by the all-powerful directions of the all-wise Being are regulated so as they happen; consequently that nothing can happen otherwise than it happens, and that all what is, is good and perfect in his kind, and contributes to the beauteous structure of the universe. The infinite Being is like a consummate Florist, who embellishes his flower-garden with all sorts of flowers of different kinds, and mixes them in such an order, and with such diversities, vicissitudes and varieties of colours and smells, that by the contrast of them, he causes such a surprising enchantment, that it turns out the most charming and most perfect object and ornament to the senses: And so has God Almighty formed the world with such varieties of actions, motions, sensations, opinions, &c. that the contrast of them gives us the highest idea of the supreme Director of all those diversified motions and actions, &c. Further, the natural man, when he reflects on the attributes of God, and reasons according to this principle, it is impossible that a thing can be and not be in the same time; he will conclude

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it is impossible that God can be perfect and not perfect in the same time; and as he must be necessarily perfect, that nothing whatsoever can be attributed to him, which is imperfect, as hatred, envy, wrath, &c. so that all such expressions must in his opinion be taken in an hieroglyphical, mystical and figurative sense; that his God must be all goodness, and consequently that he cannot decree any one to everlasting damnation, as he formed every thing for the best in its kind: Who can therefore with more propriety enjoy so much happiness, and the real *summum bonum* than the natural man, who by infallible principles is fully persuaded that he has nothing to fear from, nor to do with, an irascible, cruel, wrathful or vindictive Deity, but with an all-good, all-perfect and all-powerful God, who directs and modifies every thing with the most surprising order in such a manner, that all what is, and exists, is in its kind perfect, and for the best of the world, and all what it contains. It is likewise very difficult for a man, who is a Naturalist, to imagine or believe, that only this little earth should contain rational animals called men, and that no others of that kind should any other way subsist, but solely the descendants of Adam, and that out of those, according to the doctrine of some theologers, at least ninety-nine in a hundred should go to Hell and eternal damnation. No! he rather supposes, and with great reason, that other celestial bodies comprehend as well rational

rational animals as this earth; and as for Adam's descendants, he thinks that never a-one is to go to Hell, and burn everlastingly, as it is inconsistent with the perfections of God Almighty. I shall conclude with the sentiments of a natural man: Mr. Ferguson in his astronomy, p. 24 gives us his spirited thoughts in the following lines, " Every person who looks upon and compares the many systems of moons together, which belong to Jupiter and Saturn, must be amazed at the vast magnitude of these two planets, and the noble attendance they have in respect of our little earth, and can never bring himself to think, that an infinite wise creator should dispose of all his animals and vegetables here, leaving the other planets bare, and destitute of rational creatures: To suppose that he had any view to our benefit in creating these moons, and giving them their motions round Jupiter and Saturn, to imagine that he intended these vast bodies for any advantage to us, when he well knew that they could never be seen but by a few Astronomers peeping through telescopes; and that he gave to the planets regular returns of days and nights, and different seasons to all where they would be convenient, but of no manner of service to us, except what immediately regards our own planet the earth; to imagine, I say, that he did all this on our account, would be charging him impiously with having done much in vain, and as absurd as to imagine that he has created a little sun, and a planetary

planetary system within the shell of our earth, and intended them for our use. These considerations amount to little less than a positive proof that all the planets are inhabited, for if they are not, why all this care in furnishing them with so many moons, to supply those with light which are at the greater distance from the sun. Do we not see, that the farther a planet is from the sun, the greater apparatus it has for that purpose? Save only Mars, which being but a small planet may have moons too small to be seen by us. We know that the earth goes round the sun and turns round its own axis, to produce the vicissitudes of summer and winter by the former, and of day and night by the latter motion, for the benefit of its inhabitants. May we not then fairly conclude by parity of reason that the end and design of all the other planets is the same? And is not this agreeable to the beautiful harmony which exists throughout the universe? Surely it is, and raises in us the most magnificent ideas of the supreme Being, who is every where and at all times present, displaying his power, wisdom and goodness among all his creatures, and distributing happiness to innumerable ranks of various beings. JA 64

Let us praise the Lord! praised be the Governor of the universe, his infinite power, the immensity of his works, and his incomparable bounty be praised! Glorified be the name of God! His incomparable goodness, his wisdom and all his perfections be adored, admired and exalted. AMEN.

